MARVEL

023

SPURRIER
WALKER
DEERING
TARTAGLIA

STAR WARS™ DOCTOR APHRA

THE CATASTROPHE CON

Part IV

Doctor Aphra's escape from Accresker Jail was thwarted when current lover Magna Tolvan's rescue became a battle against Aphra's ex Sana Starros, herself on a rebel mission to kidnap the doctor.

Aphra's greed for an ancient artifact has likewise caused chaos: the treasure is guarded by a swarm of mysteriously Force-powered deadly spores. Under Imperial interrogation she has revealed their existence in an attempt to keep her darkest secret: knowledge of Darth Vader's plot to supplant the Emperor.

Fearing contagion, the Empire has abandoned the floating jail — now on a collision course with an inhabited planet! Meanwhile, enemies with scores to settle from Aphra's past, like the murderous droid Triple-Zero and the vigilante Tam Posla, close in....

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Hijacked Touring Ship.
Deep Space.

BLEEP

OH YES, *INDEED*. ONE *DOES* SO ENJOY AN *EAVESDROPPED CONVERSATION* WITH ONE'S MORNING *ATROCITIES*.

IT'S THE DELICIOUS **IMPROPRIETY** OF IT ALL. **DO** PLAY THE INTERCEPTED AUDIO, BEETEE.

KLK

UNIDENTIFIED BROADCASTER: THIS IS **TAM POSLA**. STATE YOUR NAME AND REASON FOR **CONTACT**.

POSLA, IT'S **ME**.

IT'S THE **ARCHAEOLOGIST**.

WHAT DO **YOU** WANT, VILLAIN?

AN **UNTRACEABLE** SHUTTLE. AN **IMMEDIATE** RESCUE OPERATION. AND YOUR **WORD**, AS AN HONORABLE MAN, THAT YOU WON'T KILL ME.

HA! AS ***DELUSIONAL*** AS EVER.

YOU ARE ON MY ***LIST***, MALEFACTRESS. I AM SEEKING MY NEMESIS, ***CORNELIUS EVAZAN***, BUT REST ASSURED I WILL BRING YOU JUSTICE IN DUE C--

NO.

YOU'LL COME **NOW**.

YOU WILL AGREE TO MY TERMS AND YOU WILL COME **NOW**.

I HAVE SOMETHING YOU WANT.

E-EVAZAN, THE MUTILATOR OF MILVAYNE...

DAMN YOU, WOMAN. IT'S A DEAL.

WE'RE IN ACCRESKER JAIL. HURRY.

OVER AND OUT.

BLEEP

YES, BEETEE. JUST AS YOU SAY.

BLEEP.

"WILL IT WORK, APHRA?"

WILL THIS *TAM POSLA* GUY COME *RESCUE* US?

I DON'T KNOW.

BUT I *ALSO* DON'T KNOW ANYONE *ELSE* WHO'D DELIBERATELY VISIT A BIOHAZARDOUS PRISON ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH A REBEL WORLD. DO *YOU?*

HE MUST HATE *DOCTOR EVAZAN* A LOT.

EH. DO-GOODER TYPES ARE *ALL* SECRET MONOMANIACS. CHANGE *BACK*, HUH LOPSET? NO NEED TO KEEP THE *UGLY* FACE ON.

MULTIPLE *PODS* LEAVING THE *PRISON-TUG*. THE *PENAL STAFF'S* ABANDONING SHIP.

MAKES *SENSE*, SANA. THEY GOT THE *TRACTOR FIELD* GENERATOR UP THERE. THEY CAN'T JUST CUT *LOOSE* OR THE WHOLE ASTEROID WOULD BREAK *APA--*

SHE *MEANS* THEY'RE ABANDONING IT *RIGHT AT US.*

OH.

RUN?

RUN.

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(Decommissioned.)

Accresker Jail.

OH *MY*. TH-THE--
=HUFF=--THE *CONVICTS*...

RIOTING. TSK. FALLING TO *SAVAGERY* AT THE VERY MOMENT THEY SHOULD BE *RELYING* ON EACH OTHER. *SLOPPY*.

IN *MY* EXPERIENCE, IT'S THE *RELYING ON EACH OTHER* PART WHERE THINGS GO *BAD*.

LISTEN-- SANA, TOLVAN-- I GET THAT YOU'RE BOTH KINDA, *UH*...

MURDEROUSLY *ANGRY* AT YOU.

BUT I HAVE A *PLAN!* S-SORTA. SEE, THERE'S THIS *GUY* WHO MIGHT *RESCUE* US, A-AND I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY *HOW LONG* IT'LL TAKE, BUT--

APHRA, I'M YOUR-- WELL, *WHATEVER* I AM TO YOU--AND YOU *STILL* HAD TO *BLACKMAIL* ME. NOBODY'S *COMING* FOR YOU. YOU DON'T EXACTLY INSPIRE *LOYALTY*.

THAT'S *RIDICULOUS*. PEOPLE *LOVE* M--

HER! *SHE'S* THE ONE THEY WERE INTERROGATING! I BET *SHE* CAUSED THIS!

RUN SOME *MORE?*

RUN SOME MORE.

HA!

AH HELL--

JUSSSTICCCE!

SLAM

AGH!

TH-THE *GHOST.* IT'S ON A *RAMPAGE.*

HOW MANY TIMES, LOPSET? DON'T *CALL* IT THAT.

IT'S A SENTIENT TELEKINETIC *FUNGUS.* "*GHOST*" JUST SOUNDS *SILLY.*

L-LOOK.

...IT'S LIKE--LIKE IT CAN'T STRAY TOO *FAR*. LIKE IT'S *TETHERED* TO SOMETHING.

THE *INTERCEPTOR*. THE DEAD *JEDI*...

HEY, APHRA--COULD YOU GET US INTO THE *TUG CRUISER*, NOW THAT IT'S DOWN?

UH. I DUNNO. *MAYBE?*

EW. YOUR FUNGUS REALLY FLATTENED THAT GUY...

WAIT, SH-SHOULDN'T WE JUST WAIT OUT HERE FOR *RESCUE?*

NAH. THESE TWO *KILLJOYS* ARE PROBABLY RIGHT. NOBODY'S COMING FOR ME. THE TUG'S OUR BEST BET. SAFETY... RESOURCES...

...MAYBE SOME *OTHER* SYSTEMS...

LOCKDOWN'S PRETTY *TIGHT*, BUT I CAN *BYPASS* IT. MIGHT TAKE A *WHILE*, BUT--

EVERYONE *SHUT UP* AND HELP ME WITH *THIS*.

FOOOOM

HM. EFFICIENT.

...

AREN'T YOU GOING TO *ASK* ME ABOUT HER?

WHAT'S THERE TO *ASK?*

YOU WERE *TOGETHER* ONCE.

YOU *USED* HER, *BETRAYED* HER, *BROKE* HER.

SHE'S BEEN TELLING TALES *ALREADY,* THEN.

NO.

JUST A GUESS.

AGAIN WITH THE *EW.*

THAT'S THE *INTERROGATION* BOR. TH-THEY DIDN'T EVEN STOP TO PROPERLY *FREEZE* IT.

SLOPPY.

SLOPPY'S *GOOD.* SLOPPY MEANS THERE'S *HOPE.* SLOPPY MEANS--

--THEY LEFT AN ESCAPE POD.

BAD NEWS IS, THEY SEALED THE ***BULKHEADS*** WHEN THEY SCUTTLED THE SHIP. NO WAY ***DOWN*** THERE.

W-WHAT ABOUT THAT ENORMOUS ***GUN?*** WE C--

TOO ***HEAVY*** TO LUG DOWN THERE.

IT'D MAKE NO DIFFERENCE ***ANYWAY.*** AN ESCAPE POD'S TOO ***WEAK*** TO CLEAR THE JAIL'S ***GRAVITY FIELD.***

WHAT'S THIS?

THAT'S, *UH.* ***WELL,*** THAT'S OUR DESTINATION.

TIFEREP MAJOR. POPULATION: TWO ***BILLION.*** REBEL SYMPATHIES AT 67%. WE'RE GONNA HIT IT LIKE DEATH'S OWN HANGOVER.

APPALLING LOSS OF ***LIFE.***

THOUSANDS OF REBEL RECRUITS.

MILLIONS OF COMPLIANT CIVILIANS.

US.

WAAAIT. ***GRAVITY FIELD.***

WHAT?

GIMME THAT *DROID*, LOP.

LOOK, THIS WHOLE JUNKBALL'S HELD TOGETHER BY A *TRACTOR ENVELOPE*. STOPS IT FROM *BREAKING APART*.

IF I CAN SLICE THE *GENERATOR*-- DIAL IT DOWN A LITTLE--THAT *ESCAPE POD* COULD GET OUT.

AND THE *BLAST SHIELDS?*

HEY--IF YOU CONTROL *GRAVITY* YOU CONTROL EVERYTHING.

WE CAN SMASH THOSE BULKHEADS RIGHT OPEN.

...THAT IS THE MOST *INSANELY RECKLESS* PLAN I HAVE EVER H--

IMPERIAL SECTOR CONTROL? THIS IS *INSPECTOR TOLVAN.*

COMMAND ID: *GREEN-3-8-INDIGO.* I AM STRANDED ABOARD *ACCRESKER JAIL.*

I NEED YOU TO ABORT THE PLANETSTRIKE *IMMEDIATELY.* SCRAMBLE *TRACTOR TUGS* AND CONFIRM.

HAH. NICE TRY, REBEL DUNGHEAD.

I BEG YOUR *PARDON?*

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT THAT **CODE**, BUT TOLVAN'S LOGGED ON OFFICIAL DUTY THREE SECTORS AWAY.

BESIDES-- NO **INSPECTOR** WOULD BE DUMB ENOUGH TO GET STUCK ON THAT THING.

ENJOY THE **DROP**, REB.

KLK

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RRAAAAA!

SHE'S HOT.

SHUT UP.

THAT WHOLE *THIN-VENEER-OF-DISCIPLINE* THING. IT'S VERY *YOU.*

SHUT *UP.*

Y'KNOW, IF THE REBELS DON'T KILL YOU WHEN I DRAG YOUR SCRAWNY BUTT *IN,* YOU TWO COULD LAST *FIVE,* MAYBE *TEN* MINUTES TOGETHER BEFORE YOU SCREW IT UP.

SYNDULLA'S STILL *MAD,* HUH?

YOU PUT A *BOW* ON HER HEAD, APHRA. YOU *HAVE* ANY IDEA HOW INSULTING THAT IS TO A TWI'LEK? TO *ANYONE?*

ALL SHE'S GOT TO DO IS *PAY UP* AND THE *INTEL* THE REBELS WANT IS *ALL HERS.*

UNLESS YOU WANT TO TRY *TORTURING* ME FOR THE *DECRYPT* CODES WHILE I'M TRYING TO SAVE US.

WON'T MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE TO THE FOLKS ON *TIFEREP MAJOR.*

YOU *CARE* ABOUT THAT? *HUH.* YOU'VE CHANGED...

YOU HAVEN'T.

I'M-- I'M *SORRY.* JUST SO YOU KNOW.

FOR-- FOR WHAT HAPPENED.

NO, YOU'RE NOT.

YOU'RE SORRY THAT SOMETIMES YOU FORGET HOW TO *CARE,* AND YOU'RE SORRY THAT YOU ALWAYS GET *CAUGHT.* THAT'S *ALL.*

=*SIGH*= OKAY--*LOOK.* HERE IT *IS.* I THINK YOU DESERVE TO SUFFER. IF WE *SURVIVE,* I WILL COMPLETE MY MISSION WITH ALL REQUISITE VIOLENCE.

BUT-- FOR WHAT IT'S *WORTH?* I *GET* IT.

YOU DIDN'T *ASK* TO BE BORN AWFUL.

...

IMPERIAL *INFORMANT* SYSTEM. AUTOROUTE A *SECURE MESSAGE.*

RECIPIENT'S EARS ONLY.

ALL RIGHT. HOLD *ONTO* SOMETHING, LADIES.

I'M *IN.*

AHEM.

ALL PRISONERS: THIS IS YOUR NEW **QUEEN** SPEAKING. I'M SORRY TO SAY THE LANDSCAPE WAS BEGINNING TO **BORE** ME.

RUMBLE RUMBLE RUMBLE

I'VE DECIDED TO **RENOVATE.**

WH-WHAT JUST *HAPPENED?*

SCIENCE!

GRAVITY'S SET AT *HALF*, AND THERE'S A *BULKHEAD* OPEN TO THE LAUNCH DECK! LET'S GO!

ALSO, YOU KILLED, LIKE, A HUNDRED CONVICTS.

SCIENCE!

SO--YOU *REALLY* DON'T THINK THAT POSLA GUY WILL *COME?*

NEVER HURTS TO HAVE A *BACKUP*, LOPSET.

HEY, APHRA-- HOW *DID* YOU BREACH THE BLAST SHIELDS DOWN HERE?

OH NO.

YOU MOVED THE *JEDI SHIP?!*

OH, I JUST REARRANGED SOME *JUNK* FROM DEEPER INSIDE THE ASTEROID. BROUGHT IT RIGHT UP THROUGH THE HULL.

Y'KNOW. TOTALLY AT *RANDOM.*

THAT-- THAT LOOKS LIKE--

YOU DARE TO DEFILE MY RESTING PLACE WITH YOUR PETTY SCHEMES?

BE STILL, WORMS! BE STILL AND TASTE THE LIVING FORCE!

FIRST...

FIRST AN *EON* OF SILENCE AND STUPIDITY...UNTIL THE *SPARK CAME...*

...A *SLIVER* OF LIGHT...AN *EXPLORER*...AN *INFECTION OF INTELLIGENCE* AND PURPOSE AND--*OHHH!*

OH, THE *FOCUS!* THE *CERTAINTY!* THAT *STORM* OF PERFECT CONJOINMENT!

A FEW SHORT *YEARS* WHEN *HOST* AND *SWARM* COEXISTED! AND THEN--

THE *FAILURE* OF FRAIL *FLESH*... THE *CRASH*...THE *STILLNESS*...AND THE SLOW GATHERING OF *EVIL* AND *CHAOS* AS THIS *JAIL* FILLED WITH *SCUM*...

I MUST HAVE A *MIND*. I MUST HAVE A *SPIRIT*. AND *SO*--

NOW I TASTE *YOU*...

YOU ARE A THING *DIVIDED*. SPLIT BETWEEN *INSTINCT* AND *IDEAL*...

S-STO--

YOU HAVE THE FOCUS I NEED--BUT THE *DOUBTS* EAT YOU LIKE *WORMS*...

AHH...

YOU-- HMPH. *YOU* I CANNOT TASTE AT ALL.

...

AND *YOU*?

YOU DISGUST ME.

I GET THAT A LOT.

NONE OF YOU ARE OF *USE* TO ME AS *HOSTS.*

YOU WILL *ALL* FACE MY *JUSTICE* IN THE END.

INSPECTOR THANOTH, HE...HE GAVE ME A *DEMERIT*... WHAT THE HELL *WAS* THAT?

I...I THOUGHT I SAW MY *BROTHER*...

EH, IT'S PRETTY MUCH WHAT I *THOUGHT*. YOUR BASIC *SPACE SPORE* MUTATED BY A FORCE-ACTIVE *KYBER CRYSTAL*.

MY GUESS? THE *SWARM* GOT PSYCHICALLY *IMPRINTED* WITH SOME JEDI'S *HERO COMPLEX*--CRUSH EVIL, UPHOLD JUSTICE, ALL *THAT*--BEFORE HE *CLOCKED OUT*.

BEEN STUCK HERE EVER SINCE. PROBING, TESTING, JUDGING.

WAITING FOR THE RIGHT *DO-GOODER* TO COME ALONG. *NNF*... HOW DID IT GO, LOPSET? "*ONLY A SOUL OF RIGHTEOUS FOCUS SHALL BE MY HOST.*"

DUMB THING'S GONE *SOLID* AS *STEEL*. DAMN.

WAIT.

KYBER CRYSTALS... DEAD JEDI... OHHHH, YOU LITTLE *SNAKE*...

WHAT? WHAT'S WRONG?

THERE'S A *LIGHTSABER* IN THAT SHIP, ISN'T THERE?

...

NO.

SHE KNEW ALL ABOUT THIS BEFORE WE EVEN BROKE *IN* HERE. THAT WHOLE *"CHANGE GRAVITY"* CRAP! IT'S CLASSIC *HER!*

RISKING *EVERYTHING* FOR *MUSEUM JUNK!*

MUSEUM? HOW *DARE* YOU! IT *BELONGS* IN AN ARMORY!

WELL, *TOO BAD*, Y'LITTLE PSYCHO. WE'RE *LEAVING.*

YOUR *PHANTOM'S* NOT SHIFTING OUT OF THAT *SHELL* FOR ANYTHING LESS THAN A BONA FIDE *HERO*, AND YOU'LL HAVE A HARD TIME FINDING ONE OF *THOSE* 'ROUND HERE.

...WELL, *SHUCKS.*

"I HADN'T *THOUGHT* OF THAT."

HRRRR...

Far, Far Away...

KLK

YOU DON'T KNOW ME.

I AM SCRAMBLING MY VOICE FOR REASONS THAT WILL SOON BECOME OBVIOUS.

IT IS MY STRONG RECOMMENDATION THAT YOU DO NOT PLAY THIS RECORDING UNTIL YOU'RE ASSURED OF TOTAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SURVEILLANCE INTEGRITY.

CAN YOU TRUST THE OFFICER WHO BROUGHT YOU THIS MESSAGE?

YAAAAA--KRAK

I WISH TO REPORT THAT I HAVE UNCOVERED A CONSPIRACY WITHIN THE EMPIRE.

A CONSPIRACY TO USURP THE EMPEROR HIMSELF.

A CONSPIRACY, SIR, TO REPLACE HIM WITH A FORCE-SENSITIVE HUMAN CURRENTLY AT LARGE AMONG REBEL FORCES.

A CONSPIRACY THAT WOULD SHAKE THIS REGIME TO ITS VERY FOUNDATIONS, IF PERMITTED TO BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE.

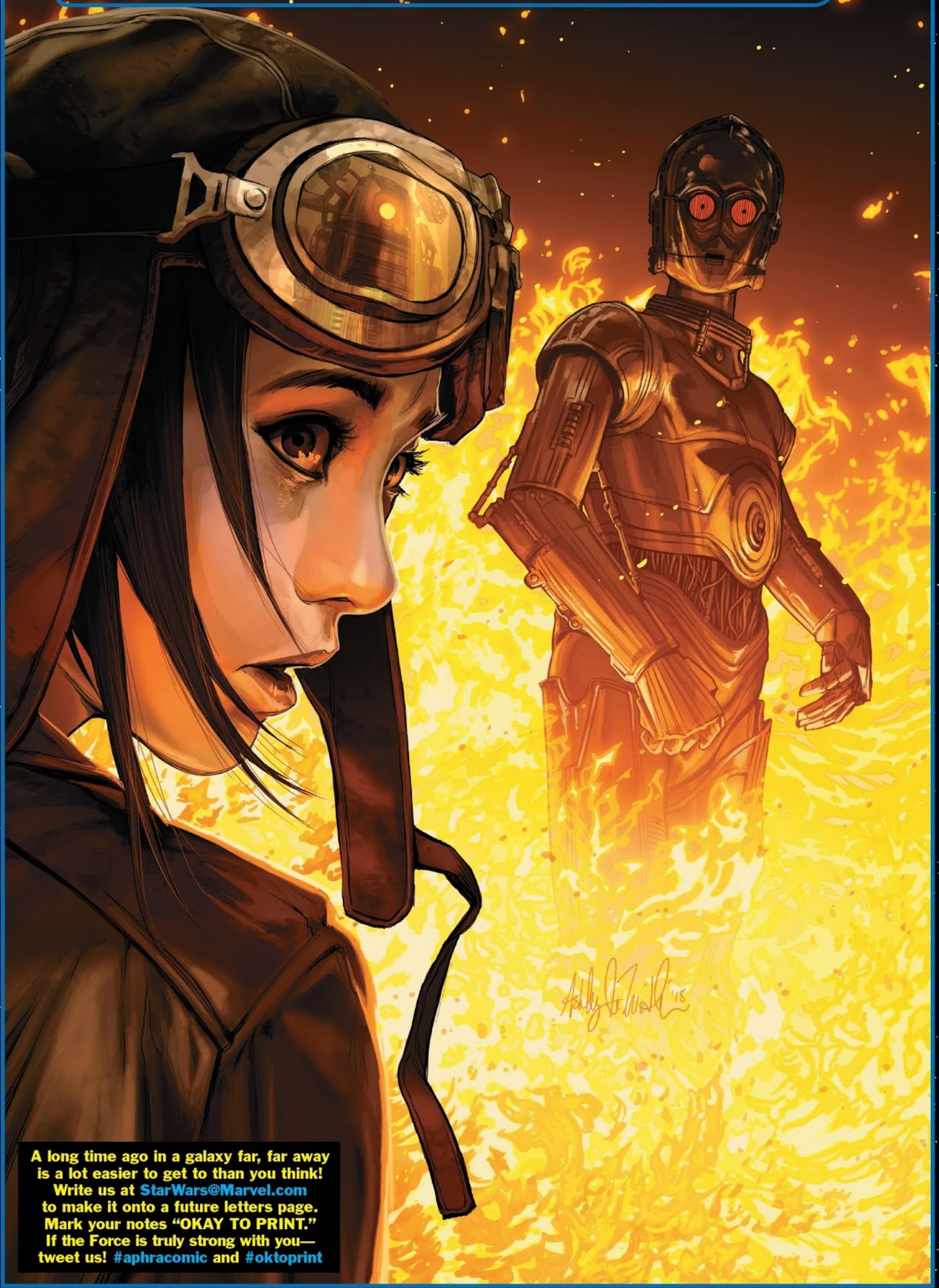
YOUR CONSPIRACY, MY LORD.

"I IMAGINE YOU WILL WISH TO DISCUSS THIS IN *PERSON*."

To Be Continued!

DOCTOR APHRA

NEXT ISSUE:



A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away is a lot easier to get to than you think! Write us at StarWars@Marvel.com to make it onto a future letters page. Mark your notes "OKAY TO PRINT." If the Force is truly strong with you—tweet us! #aphracomic and #oktoprint